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ABSTRACT

This paper addresses the question of teacher socialization through contrived images, i.e., the influence of advertising as part of an educational and socialization process. It examines ways in which computer advertisements directed towards teachers influence their perceptions of how computers can and should be used, and how the same advertisements help dictate the types of computer instruction currently in use in schools. A model developed by Robert Muffoletto is used to examine two computer system advertisements for direct and embedded messages. This model describes three elements in a photograph that interact with the viewer's sum total experience to give the viewer meaning: relationship, prop, and gesture. (Relationship is concerned with the spatial positioning of objects in the picture; props are objects within the picture and may be fully contained in a frame or may extend beyond a frame; and gesture refers to the action of props toward other props.) It is concluded that computer advertisements have psychological as well as sociological impact, and that embedded messages tie in with existing perceptions regarding computer use in the curriculum. Eight references are listed. (LMM)

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TITLE: Drill Sergeant or Math Teacher: Teacher Socialization and Computer Advertisements

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Drill Sergeant or Math Teacher
Teacher Socialization and Computer Advertisements

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This theoretical paper addresses the question of teacher socialization through contrived images; more precisely, the influence of advertising as part of an educational and socialization process. It will examine how computer advertisements directed towards teachers influence their perceptions of how computers can and should be used, and how the same advertisements help dictate the types of computer instruction in use in the schools today.

The goal of advertising is to motivate behavior--to sell a product, service or idea. To accomplish these goals it is important to have an understanding of the psychological and social forces that influence human behavior. This paper focuses on the consideration of these forces in conjuction with advertising's deliberate image-making with the intent to sell.

Teachers must make rational choices concerning the use of computers, (or the decision not to use them). "Most researchers would agree that consumers (in this case teachers) use advertising as a prime source of information and that they use it as a time-saving way to help them make product decisions." (Holtje, 1978) With this in mind, computer companies go to great lengths to supply teachers/consumers with the best attention getting ads and sales campaigns with the intent to sell their products. It is in this way that computer advertising plays a crucial role in the dissemination of information, and thus helps teachers make rational choices about the product they wish to purchase.

The institutional definition of advertising is: "The presentation and promotion of ideas, goods, or services by an identified sponsor. At one time, manufacturers would develop products and then try to sell them; it was a cart-before-the-horse situation, in which the needs of the consumers were seldom considered. ...Modern marketing is consumer-oriented." (Holtje, 1978) Today, the target group, defines WHAT is to be said, HOW it is to be said, WHEN it is to be said, and WHO is to say it, by making their needs publically known. (Kolter, 1982) Advertisers base their advertising strategies upon these critical facts. In other words, once the target group and their needs are identified, the advertiser can develop the message so their products appear to meet a perceived need of the consumer. The extent to which a company can present itself and the product, (computers) in relation to the target audience needs, advertising can be successful.

The message of advertisements is designed to fulfill a need. The message content is also designed with a particular appeal, theme, idea or unique selling proposition often linked to psychological considerations of the target group. It may be a rational, emotional or moral appeal. Rational appeals are directed to the rational self-interest of the audience. Emotional appeals stir up positive or negative emotion that will motivate product interest or purchase. Moral appeals deal with the issue of right and wrong.

Advertising may also be looked at from a sociological standpoint, as pointed out by Goffman. According to Goffman in the book Gender Advertisements "the task of the advertiser is to favorably dispose viewers to his product, his means, and by and large, to show a sparkling version of that product in the context of glamouous events." One can interpret this statement to mean that the job of the

advertisers is two-fold. First, to present his product favorably and sell it, and second, to communicate to the viewer social implications of buying a product or an idea. An implication of this is that if you buy the product, you are probably apt to buy the other ideas being communicated in that advertisement. John Berger in Ways of Seeing states that, "publicity (advertising) adds up to a kind of philosophical system. It explains everything in its own terms. It interprets the world."

Interestingly, Goffman notes that the advertiser transforms "opague goings on" into "readable form". This means that advertisements take advantage of unclear, unconcise thoughts and ideas and gives them structure and encoded meaning, thereby increasing the chances that the viewer will purchase their product. He goes on to say that, "it is the inclination of individuals and society to fall back from a conscious struggle to understand ourselves and learn about ourselves at a remove, and to accept as real an almost wholly unassumed self." (Goffman 1976) This can be interpreted as meaning individuals have a tendency to view advertisements and accept a pictorial staged representation, as being real life, thus causing them to accept what they see at face value rather than view the advertisements with a critical eye.

Knowledge of what microcomputers can and cannot do is needed for rational decisions by educational leaders.(Judd 1984) Therefore, it is logical to assume teachers will seek out information which will enable them to make those decisions. This coupled with the fast pace of this technological industry encourages teachers to look to ads for educational purposes. Advertisers also realize the need for an educational approach to the introduction and exhibition of their

product to suit their target market. Together it creates a marketing strategy based upon an educational format.

The photographs examined in this paper fit the criteria for being considered educational photographs as discussed in the previous parpagraph -- that they seek to inform the educators seeking information about the product. It is our hypothesis that advertisements do in reality teach, and teachers who view microcomputer advertisements learn about microcomputers.

But to what extent do teachers also learn about educational issues surrounding computers? Are social messages embedded in those advertisements?

Judith Williamson notes that "Advertising gives goods a social meaning. Material things we need are made to represent other non-material things we need; the point of exchange is where meaning is created." (Williamson 1978) Goffman (1976) more specifically points out the nature of embedded signals when pictures are arranged, rigged, or set up, implying that scenes real enough in their own right are brought to induce radically wrong inferences. Staging the scene results in pictures of covertly contrived displays; the picture appears realistic, but is not reality. It follows that convertly contrived messages could influence a variety of decisions made by teachers regarding computers; including the purchase of hardware, software, integration of computers into the curriculum, the role of computers in education, and methods of assimilation and use of the computer in the schools and individual classrooms.

It is because of these "covert messages" embedded in advertising that it's necessary to scrutinize advertisements with a critical eye. One must understand what they signify and the potential effect on

teacher's perceptions of computers. It is like the "hidden curriculum" of advertising. As part of critical evaluation of advertising one must consider: what is the message, whose message it is, and what is the message's effect on the viewer. (Muffoletto, 1984)

The model used in examing the two advertisements chosen for this paper was developed by Robert Muffoletto PhD. In his model he describes three elements in a photograph which interact with the viewers sum total experience giving the viewer meaning. The elements discussed are; relationship, prop and gesture.

Relationship is concerned with the spatial positioning of objects in the picture. The relationships may be thought of in terms of large/small, infront/behind, above/below, apart/together and so on. The pictorial representations of these relationships creates a psychological relationship. For example, Gaufman in Gender Advertisements points out that a man positioned higher then a woman in a photograph symbolizes the man's high social place or dominance.

The camera angle used to shoot the picture will also affect the relationship. Monaco (1981) points outs "That high-angle shots dimminish the importance of the subject, while low-angle shots emphasize its power. For example, a picture shot from a high angle will cause the viewer to feel like they're looking down on a situation from a positon of power. (Muffoletto, 1984)

Props are objects within the picture. They may be fully contained in a frame or may extend beyond a frame. Props themselves may include people, clothing, handled and unhandled objects. These objects constitute the content of the picture. The interaction of the elements in the frame create the meaning. For instance, similar to the use of "frame" in film, when the photographer choses to depict

action which extends outside the confinds of the actual picture area, the form is considered to be "open". In an open form the viewer is subliminally aware of the action which extends beyond the defined area of the frame. If the image of the frame is to be considered self-sufficient, then the form is considered a 'closed form'.(Monaco, 1981)

Gesture is the third category and it refers to the action of props towards other props. Typical gestures include: reaching, touching, looking, pointing, standing and walking. Meaning is derived when the viewer looks at the props, and how the gestures are directed.(Muffoletto,1984)

The three codes of relationship, prop and gesture interact together to form the image to be decoded by the reader. It is in the analysis of the juxtaposition of these three codes that allows the signification of the image to be deconstructed and them reconstructed by the viewer into another encoded message (Hall 1982). It is important to note that the viewer may decode a message which differs from the intended message. The message decoded depends on the individuals' meaning given to the three seperate codes in the picture.

Two ads were chosen as examples of how the model would be used to analyze messages encoded in ads. Both ads appeared in the magazine Classroom Computing .

The first is an advertisement for an APPLE Computer System, called the "School Bus". The elements the picture include:

Props

- a woman teacher
- three male students
- three female students
- minorities are included among students
- seven APPLE computers, and monitors
- books on the teachers' and students' desks
- paper and pencils on desks

- hair brush
- two tote bags
- one WALKMAN

Key Words

- efficient
- control
- communicate
- teacher effectiveness

Relationship:

The relationship between the students and the teacher is defined by the arrows going out from the teacher's desk to each student, and back to the teacher.

Gestures:

Students and the teacher are all reaching out toward the computer, touching keyboards. Their attention is directed towards the monitors.

The messages contained in this ad are numerous. The obvious one is to buy the "school bus" system to manage your classroom. The other embedded messages could be interpreted as:

- how to set up a structured computer classroom
- instruction can be managed efficeintly using a comprehensive system
- the system will enhance classroom control
- the system will increase student productivity
- the system will fit in with existing curriculum
- computers can be easily accessed by both teachers and students
- instruction can be individualized
- teachers can manage instruction easily via computers
- all students can learn computing
- the system will help teachers be accountable for student work
- students can learn academic basics and computing at the same time
- communication between students and teachers can increase
- communication between students is decreased
- both students and teachers "like" working with computers

The second advertisement is for educational materials designed by the FISHER SCIENTIFIC COMPANY. The ad takes a futuristic approach in marketing a computer called the "S+".

Props:

- one teacher
- six visible students; 3 male, 3 female
- two partially visible students;
  the open frame indicating additional students in the room
- eight computer terminals
- eight different pages of text on the screens
- clean desk tops
- glimmering lights

Key Words

- unlock imaginations
- awesome responsibility
- tomorrow
- limitation-free

Relationship

The relationsnip between the teacher and students is shown by the teacher hovering over the student and the computer monitor. There is no relationship indicated between the students.

Gestures

The teacher is gesturing towards the student and computer by leaning, showing acceptance and direction. The students only gestures are towards the keyboard and monitor. They are touching the keyboard and looking only at the monitor.

The main message in this ad is to purchase a computer system to manage instruction. The other covert messages may be interpreted as:

- computer education is the "wave of the future"
- students' futures will be enhanced by knowing computer programming
- education can exist independently of traditional curriculum
- all courses can be taught via computer
- teachers manage instruction
- instruction can be individualized
- students will stay "on task"
- behavior management will be simplified
- teachers can learn programming
- students can and should learn programming
- interactions between students is minimized while interaction between teachers and students is maximized.

The two advertisements examined support the notion that teachers

need machines to make the learning situation better. They propose that the integation of computers into the classroom will improve the education which students are currently receiving. They do this by stressing pertinent educational issues such as individualized instruction, classroom structure, individually paced instruction, behavior management and the productive use of classroom time.

In conclusion

Teachers are under a great deal of pressure to integrate computers into the curriculum. Computer companies recognizing this need, target this audience (teachers) and run advertisements which suggest that the need to incorporate computers into the curriculum is great. The advertisers through the use of varied appeals indicate that educational needs can be met through the purchase of computers and commercially designed software.

However, these advertisements have psychological as well as sociological impact. They contain educational and visual messages which cue teachers to take in the overt and covert information contained in the ads and decode that information. Through contrived use of the three codes, relationship, prop, and gesture, an image is created which is not necessarily a representation of reality. Furthermore, the juxtaposition of the elements in the ad may lead the viewer to decode messages other than the "product selling" aspect of the advertisement. These "embedded" messages tie-in with the existing perceptions regarding the use of computers in the curriculum. An example of this would be the perceived suggestion that incorporating computers into the curriculum will improve the quality of education

and offer an improved alternative over what already exists. Therefore the "hidden curriculum" of computer advertisements has a direct effect on the teacher's perception of the evolving classroom environment.

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